

LESSON 5: COLLEGE PREPARATION



*admissions
aptitude tests
college
distance education
financial aid
registration
scholarships
transcripts
tuition
university*

INTRODUCTION

Lessons One and Two in this chapter provided tools to help you make important decisions about your future after high school. You learned how to develop a career strategy, how to determine your aptitude for different careers, and how to create a career portfolio that organizes all the pieces of your high school life.

Lessons Three and Four showed you the opportunities and benefits of civilian and military career choices, how to determine your aptitude for different choices, and how to pursue them.

This lesson will help you prepare for **college**. It will tell you what you need to know about the different types of colleges, the admission process and requirements, and ways to finance college.

DECIDING WHETHER COLLEGE IS RIGHT FOR YOU

Before you can begin preparing for college, you have to ask yourself a few questions. “What are my reasons for attending college?” “What are my reasons for not attending college?”

Attending college is not the only way to attain your career goals. It is possible that certain careers can be pursued without a traditional four-year college program. Take nursing for example. You must earn either a two-year associate degree or a four-year baccalaureate degree to qualify for a job as a registered nurse. However, in a two-year program at a community college, you would not take the courses in management and public health found in the four-year counterpart, but you would get more clinical experience.

If a traditional college or **university** does not cover your career choice, you might explore the opportunities that a Business, Trade, or Technical School has to offer. The length of study at these schools varies from a few weeks to a few years. You can learn a particular skill or trade and earn a diploma, certificate of completion, or a license of some sort following the completion of the program. Some examples of occupations for which these schools can provide instruction are court reporting, hairstyling, computer repair, and cooking.

Another alternative to a four-year college program is E-learning, or **distance education**. Distance education has its advantages. The reduced need for buildings, housing, and personnel costs may make tuition more affordable.

Online classes through distance education institutions or universities are often more convenient and can be taken at different times and places. Other distance education programs, may make use of other technologies including the following: video, audio, audio-graphics, text-based correspondence, radio, broadcast TV, etc. Additionally, many employers offer distance classes on the job.

If your career choice does not require going to college, you need to first identify the workplace skills and experiences necessary to pursue your career goals, then find the resources that help you reach them.

HOW CAREERS AND MAJORS ARE RELATED

Do you know what you want to be when you grow up? Do not feel that you are far behind if you do not at this stage of the game? Many students don't have an idea until they actually start taking college classes and find what interests them. Choosing your college major is one of the most important decisions that you will make.

Taking a personal assessment and discovering your aptitudes, interests, abilities, and personal preferences, and then matching them with occupations, can lead to a major in college.

You can do research on your own to learn where and how to get information on different careers. If you meet a person who has an interesting job, ask them if they have a degree and in what major.

Many people have careers that are not strongly related to their college major. Employers look for well-rounded people who have done well in college no matter what their major was.

It is most likely that you will be working for the majority of your adult life. Choosing a career or college major that fits with your values, interests, and abilities will likely lead you in the direction of job satisfaction.

THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

The process of applying to college should begin in the fall of your high school senior year. If you are applying to more than one college, the process can become overwhelming. It is important that you are organized and have your career development portfolio up to date.

The following steps outline the major tasks involved in the admission process:

1. Gathering applications from the colleges you are considering
2. Knowing the application deadlines for each college
3. Completing and mailing each admission application
4. Applying for **financial aid** (keep in mind application deadlines)
5. Applying for **scholarships** (keep in mind application deadlines)
6. Applying for campus housing if you are not living at home while you attend college
7. Making your college choice, enrolling, and registering for classes

GENERAL ADMISSION OR ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS

Admission or entrance requirements can differ from one college to another, however there are basic criteria that are required for the majority of colleges.

One of the basic admission requirements is that you must have graduated from an accredited high school or have earned a GED (General Equivalency Diploma). Many colleges require specific coursework or curricula from high school. For example, a college could require that you have four years of English, three years of Math, two years of History and Science, as well as a required number of course electives. Some colleges look at your grade point average, your rank-in-class (this is usually found on your school **transcripts**), and/or standardized test scores such as ACT (American College Test), or SAT (Scholastic **Aptitude Test**.)

WAYS TO FINANCE COLLEGE

You have your list of colleges that you would like to attend. Everything is perfect, from the exact major you want, to the size of the campus, to a picture perfect location. Your next step is to look at the costs and figure out which ones you can afford. For most students, the **tuition** and other higher education expenses require seeking funding from someplace other than parents. There are two forms of financial aid funding for college: “gift aid” and “self help aid.”

GIFT AID

Gift aid does not have to be paid back. It can come from a variety of sources, businesses and foundations, community groups, and the colleges and universities to which you apply. There are two forms of gift aid:

- *Grants* are awarded based on your financial need
- *Scholarships* are awarded based on your academic merit.

SELF-HELP AID

You or your parents may need to borrow money for your college education. *Loans* are normally repaid with interest. Some loans do not need to be repaid until you have graduated or left college for some other reason.

Student employment is another form of self-help aid. There are three common forms of student employment:

- Federal and state work-study programs
- Teaching Assistantships and Research Assistantships
- Regular part-time employment during the academic year or the summer months

Finding college funding can be a complicated and confusing process. Following a few ground rules will give you an advantage in navigating the process.

1. Make contact with your college’s financial aid office early.
2. Have all of the verification information you need by submittal deadlines.
3. Organize your information and keep your portfolio files updated.

CHOOSING AN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION THAT FITS YOUR NEEDS

Choosing a college is probably one of the first major decisions you will make in your life. This is where the work that you put into your career development strategy begins to pay off. You have a plan and it will help you make the best possible decision as to which college to attend.

The following tips will help you choose the right college:

- You will most likely receive brochures from colleges through the mail. Read them and if you are interested, request more information.
- Request information from other colleges that in which you are interested.
- Talk to your parents, friends, and other family members about college, the colleges they attended, and their personal experience with college.
- Write down what you are looking for in a college.
- Make a “wish list” of colleges you would like to attend.
- Complete the process by narrowing down the list to three to six schools.
- Apply to each of these colleges.



CONCLUSION

After you have gone through the process of picking a major, applying for financial aid, choosing and applying to a college, you now wait to get accepted. Once you are accepted, you will need to contact your chosen school to find out its **registration** procedures. There are no guarantees in this process, but you can be assured that if you followed the suggestions in this and the other lessons in this chapter, are committed to the process and motivated to succeed, you will reach your career goals.

Material for this lesson was adapted from the Website CollegePrep 101 by Lance Millis at <http://home.okstate.edu/homepages>